United Nations E/CN.3/2012/7

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
16 December 2011

Original: English

Statistical Commission
Forty-third session
28 February-2 March 2012
Item 3 (d) of the provisional agenda*
Items for discussion and decision: agricultural statistics

Report of the Wye Group on statistics on rural development and agriculture household income

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit the report of the Wye Group on statistics on rural development and agriculture household income. The Statistical Commission is invited to take note of the report of the Wye Group and, in doing so, to recognize the Group's work on the second edition of its Handbook, entitled *Wye Group Handbook: Statistics on Rural Development and Agriculture Household Income*.

* E/CN.3/2012/1.

11-64273 (E) 050112

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Report of the Wye Group on statistics on rural development and agriculture household income

1. The Wye Group on statistics on rural development and agriculture household income was established by the Statistical Commission at its thirty-eighth session, held from 27 February to 2 March 2007, following the completion by the Intersecretariat Working Group on Agriculture and Rural Indicators of the Handbook entitled *Rural Households' Livelihood and Well-Being: Statistics on Rural Development and Agriculture Household Income*.[1]

2. The Wye Group has successfully completed the outputs listed in its terms of reference, namely, the revision of the 2005 Handbook and the publication of the proceedings from the annual meetings focused on debating the implementation of consistent methods for rural data collection and their use in policy analysis.

3. These outputs support the objectives under the mandate of the Commission, namely: to support the adoption of consistent and comparable methods of data collection across countries; focus on the application and value of data standards in developing countries; assess and explore the potential for improved statistics for policy indicators and in empirical analysis; and determine the need to change or update the Handbook, and carry out the revision.

4. At the second meeting of the Wye Group, a decision was taken to update the Handbook in such a way as to reflect practices in non-Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries at different levels of development. The Group has been working over the last four years on updating the Handbook, by expanding its scope to include applications to developing countries. The revision will be published only in electronic form. The work taken to update the Handbook has been completed and the institutional home of the Handbook will be the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). The Handbook will be hosted on the FAO website by early 2012. The host will also manage the third-party links in the Handbook and any updating of the Handbook as is deemed necessary, together with an advisory group and referees. Members of the Wye Group have proposed that dissemination activities include:

(a) Submission of individual elements of the Handbook to Wikipedia in order to influence common knowledge;

(b) Inclusion on the host website of a facility for comments and a counter for visits and downloads.

5. The second edition of the Handbook is entitled *Wye Group Handbook: Statistics on Rural Development and Agriculture Household Income*, second edition. The Handbook provides a comprehensive compendium of basic concepts and standards in statistics on rural development and agricultural household income, building from a base characterized by little common knowledge or agreement. It provides a perspective on the most important concepts in the area and the main questions that need to be considered by countries when adopting related concepts or measures. Part one, on rural development statistics, focuses attention on the main objectives of rural development policy, and provides conceptual frameworks and inventories for rural classification, rural development statistics, indicators and data

[1] United Nations publication, Sales No. E.07.II.E.14.

sources. Part two offers a conceptual framework for farm household income, wealth and well-being and provides a comprehensive picture of the various definitions of the agricultural household, income distribution and well-being, and farm household wealth and income and related measures.

6. The Handbook is structured around a series of core items which provide key information on the topics. The core text is hyperlinked to case studies which are examined in greater detail. Further information is offered through links to further readings, references and primary data sources. The complete table of contents of the Handbook is provided in a background document.

7. The fourth annual meeting of the Wye Group was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from 9 to 11 November 2011, for the purpose of presenting the Handbook and discussing the future of the Wye Group in relation to the Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics. Additional outcomes of the meeting were to support the Global Strategy by highlighting emerging needs in rural statistics for countries at different levels of development; to share good practices and identify possible uses of new tools in rural statistics in countries at different stages of development; and to explore uses of improved statistics for policy and empirical analysis. The conference was hosted by the Institute of Geography and Statistics of Brazil and co-organized with FAO. The meeting was well attended, with over 80 participants from international organizations, national statistical offices, policy institutions and universities. In total, 18 countries and 30 organizations (including several from developing countries) were represented.

8. The sessions highlighted work relevant to the topics of the Handbook and the relationship between the work of the Wye Group and the Global Strategy, including in Latin America. Key themes covered were the role of statistics in supporting sustainable agricultural and rural development; measures of well-being; climate change and agriculture; gender-disaggregated rural statistics; use of rural statistics in Latin America; and reconciling different data-collection instruments and innovative methodologies. A complete overview of the meeting and sessions is available in a background document.

9. Common findings across sessions encompassed the need to be realistic in developing a system of statistical data collection by focusing on the core data items required by policymakers and on the production of timely data. In this regard, the potential of new technologies, such as the Global Positioning System for plot-area measurement, satellite imagery and cloud computing, to provide statistical data quickly and at a low cost, was highlighted. Methods proposed should be realistic, so as to be commensurate with the capacity available in countries. For example, where no other systems are available, use of satellite imagery and geo-referenced administrative areas could quickly provide a basis for developing the sample frame. In other cases, statistical systems could better make use of other available data sources, such as those for administrative data, to provide the most cost-effective and timely data.

10. Several sessions presented the results of analysis of agricultural and rural development. The papers focused on a wide range of topics including measurement of poverty trends, food security, tools for protecting rural households in support of climate change adaption, the role of gender in agricultural productivity and improving market opportunities for farmers. The wide range of means of data collection available and the interesting findings notwithstanding, many of the

presentations chose to highlight the difficulties inherent in using existing data sources owing to lack of information relating to both households and agriculture, difficulties associated with the concepts used and lack of a consistent source of data over time. This foregrounded the continuing gap in respect of the availability of accurate statistical data that use common definitions and concepts over time for research and policy needs of agricultural and rural development.

11. The final session of the meeting discussed options for the future of the Wye Group. The Wye Group has completed the outputs listed in its terms of reference and this being the case, it has been proposed that the activities of the Group be closed. The session highlighted the fact that, in the course of its work, the Wye Group has provided a regular forum for the discussion of rural and agricultural statistics where none had previously existed. The Group has been unique in its multidisciplinarity, featuring participants from official statistics, research institutions, policy bodies and both developing and developed countries. This coming together of producers and users has been particularly useful in highlighting core data needs and in enabling users to understand the challenges of data collection.

12. The discussion on the future of the Wye Group highlighted the importance of the close links between the material in the Handbook and the pillars of the Global Strategy, particularly as regards the integration of agriculture into the national statistical system; the need to have strong country involvement; the importance of linking agricultural statistics and rural development; the need to help countries apply statistics on agricultural and rural development; the need for flexibility with respect to incorporating emerging issues; and the benefits of an interdisciplinary forum. In this regard, it was proposed that elements of the Wye Group be incorporated into the proposed inter-agency and expert group on agricultural and rural statistics, as described in the terms of reference of the Group, and that mechanisms for obtaining feedback and ensuring periodic updating of the Handbook also be included. Further proposals in respect of the inter-agency group will be presented under the discussion item concerning the review of the Action Plan to Implement the Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics.

13. The Commission is invited to take note of the report of the Wye Group and in doing so, to recognize the work of the Group on the second edition of the Handbook entitled *Statistics on Rural Development and Agriculture Household Income*.